January 21, 2026

11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program
Ms. Kelly Hammerle
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (VAM–LD)
U.S. Department of Interior
45600 Woodland Road,
Sterling, VA 20166-9216

RE: Opposition to New Lease Sales in the Draft Proposed 5-Year OCS Oil & Gas Leasing Program from Surfrider Foundation Texas Chapters (Galveston and Coastal Bend)

Dear Secretary,

The Surfrider Foundation Texas Chapters write to express our strong opposition to new oil and gas lease sales in the next 5-Year OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. Specifically, we ask that you protect the Western Gulf and all other U.S. waters from new oil and gas development.

The expansion of offshore oil and gas development in the waters stretching the Texas coastline would cause significant and unnecessary negative impacts to our state's marine ecosystems, wildlife, coastal communities, and vital recreation and tourism industries.

Offshore oil and gas development in new areas would require seismic surveys, drilling operations, oil transport by tankers, and the installation of platforms, pipelines, and other infrastructure. Collectively these activities would significantly damage the environment, marine wildlife, coastal economies and ways of life. New offshore drilling would also expose the marine environment and coastal communities to the risks of another catastrophic oil spill. Finally, new offshore oil and gas leasing would exacerbate the climate crisis as our nation and world struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Coastal businesses depend on clean beaches and waters, abundant wildlife, and scenic viewsheds – all of which would be compromised by the expansion of offshore drilling and an increased risk of spills. A major spill would cause catastrophic impacts to these coastal communities, a truth we should have learned from previous spills that have had long-lasting impacts on local tourism rates.

The federal offshore drilling program directly impacts our **nation's ocean recreation, tourism, and fisheries industries** that generate over $520 billion annually. These industries depend on a clean coastal environment to support a combined 2.5 million jobs across the United States. Allowing new offshore drilling will damage public resources that these industries depend upon by generating harmful impacts through every phase of the drilling process. Such drilling will subject communities to the ever-present risks of oil spills and onshore impacts which can be catastrophic to both the environment and economy.

Numerous activities contribute to making **tourism the third largest industry in Texas,** after oil and gas production and agriculture. Clean beaches and a healthy environment are the lifeblood of Texas's robust coastal economy, with tourism generating about $5.4 billion in direct GDP contributions annually for our state[1].

- Beach tourism, especially birding, is a very popular activity which results in massive visitors to our coastlines during migration seasons, as well as year round excitement for the activity. Tourism for the whooping crane alone results in over $6 million to Texas' coastal economy.
- Saltwater recreational fishing generates an estimated $2 billion [2]
- And commercial fishing in Texas' estuaries produces over 100 million pounds of seafood valued at $150-$250 million per year[1].

An overwhelming majority of the public is opposed to new offshore oil and gas drilling. To date, over 400 municipalities, 2,500 elected officials, 59,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families across the United States have formally opposed new offshore oil and gas development. Further, according to a national poll, an estimated 64% of registered U.S. voters are opposed to new offshore drilling. The widespread opposition to new offshore drilling in U.S. waters is bipartisan and reflected throughout various regions of the country.

Finally, oil and gas development disproportionately impacts lower-income and communities of color who, too often, bear the brunt of fossil fuel operations. In the Gulf, the oil and gas industry has contributed to the extensive loss of coastal wetlands, leaving communities more vulnerable to flooding and extreme weather events. Meanwhile, onshore infrastructure associated with offshore leasing pollutes frontline communities and damages public health. The Department must account for these inequities in its analysis of potential new oil and gas lease sales in public waters.

In summary, we ask you to protect all U.S. waters including the Western Gulf from any new oil and gas leasing in the 11th OCS Oil and Gas Program. We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

Sincerely,

Sarah Burgess
Chair, Surfrider Foundation Galveston Chapter

Neil McQueen
Co-Chair, Surfrider Foundation Texas Coastal Bend Chapter

Stuart Diamond
Chair, Surfrider Foundation South Texas Chapter

[1] Texas General Land Office, Guidance for Sustainable Stormwater Drainage on the Texas Coast, 3rd edition, 2021, Section 1.4.3.
[2] Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) 2014. The State of Water in the Gulf Coast. http://www. texasthestateofwater.org/screening/html/regions-gulf.htm.